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# Trial of Ex-Navy Man Named As Spy for Soviet Set to Begin

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SAN FRANCISCO, March 2 — What is being billed by prosecutors as one of the most important and complex espionage trials in decades is scheduled to begin this week in a Federal courtroom here.

The defendant, Jerry A. Whitworth, a retired Navy communications specialist, is accused of providing the Soviet Union with the chance to break highly sensitive communications codes used by the American military.

If the accusation is true, prosecutors say, Mr. Whitworth and his friend John A. Walker Jr. may have done more damage to national security than any spies caught in this country in 30 years. Mr. Whitworth has pleaded not guilty to a 13-count indictment charging him with espionage, conspiracy and tax evasion.

The trial, which could last until May, is expected to disclose what a prosecutor has described as a "great detective story," the "incredible, painstaking" nine-month investigation of the case. "We look forward to explaining how it was done," he said.

Jury selection is to begin Tuesday in Federal District Court. A hearing on the admissibility of some letters the prosecution wants to use as evidence is scheduled for Monday.

## Testimony by Walker

The trial should give the public its first chance to hear directly from Mr. Walker, a retired Navy warrant officer who has confessed to forming a spy ring that he says included Mr. Whitworth and two other members of the Walker family.

Mr. Walker, who pleaded guilty in October to three felony espionage charges, is expected to testify that he met with Mr. Whitworth at Navy ports around the world and gave him hundreds of thousands of dollars in exchange for military secrets, including information about the Navy machines used to encode secret messages.

Mr. Whitworth, who had top-secret security clearance in a Navy career of two decades, has been accused of supplying Mr. Walker with technical manuals and design plans for the machines, as well as the guides that are used to change the codes daily. That information, officials say, may have given the Soviet military the ability to build a replica of American encoding machines and to read Navy communications for years.

The United States Attorney here, Joseph P. Russoniello, said in a statement in December: "It would appear that this was one of the most serious security breaches that the United States has suffered since World War II."

## Walker's Truthfulness at Issue

Lawyers for Mr. Whitworth, who is 46 years old, say they will show that the Government's case rests largely on testimony from Mr. Walker, whose truthfulness they question. Defense lawyers have charged prosecutors with exploiting publicity about the case and exaggerating the evidence against Mr. Whitworth.

Mr. Whitworth's lawyers and a devoted group of his friends insist that he is innocent. He is being framed by Mr. Walker, they say.

Mr. Walker's son, Michael, and brother Arthur, both former Navy men, have said they were recruited

into espionage by Mr. Walker, who began his spying career in the 1960's. Michael Walker has also pleaded guilty to espionage, and Arthur Walker was convicted of seven charges in August.

"Walker is a completely unsavory character," said James Larson, one of Mr. Whitworth's lawyers. "His testimony is not to be believed."

John Walker pleaded guilty in exchange for leniency for his son, a Navy yeoman. The plea bargain is dependent on Mr. Walker's promise to help prosecutors in their case against Mr. Whitworth, and that agreement, defense lawyers say, has given Mr. Walker an incentive to lie.

The trial is also expected to add new detail to what has become an extraordinary family saga. John Walker became a spy, recruited his son into espionage, tried to recruit a troubled daughter and was finally betrayed by his former wife, Barbara. Mrs. Walker has acknowledged that she exposed her former husband in a telephone call to the authorities, which led in turn to the arrest of their only son.

Mrs. Walker is listed as a possible witness at the Whitworth trial, as are several other members of the family.

The case against Mr. Whitworth is expected to be more difficult to prove than those against others connected to Mr. Walker.

## Complicated Case Foreseen

The evidence against the Walkers was strong. John Walker, for example, was arrested by the Federal Bureau of Investigation shortly after he was observed dropping a package of secret Navy documents under a tree in rural Maryland. A Soviet diplomat was driving nearby.

There appears to be no conclusive evidence against Mr. Whitworth, although prosecutors say they will present a strong if complicated case.

Prosecutors have acknowledged that they face a challenge in proving that Mr. Whitworth received large amounts of money — at least \$330,000, according to the indictment — in exchange for espionage activities.

When he was arrested in June Mr. Whitworth was living in a rented olive-drab trailer in Davis, Calif., not far from Sacramento. He and his wife, Brenda, drove unpretentious cars, and it seemed that their only obvious indulgences were a good stereo system and gourmet meals cooked at home.

Government lawyers are hoping their case against Mr. Whitworth will be greatly strengthened at the hearing Monday, when the judge, John P. Vukasin, is expected to decide whether to allow prosecutors to make use of four letters that prosecutors say Mr. Whitworth wrote to the F.B.I. in 1964, offering to expose a spy ring that had passed "top-secret cryptographic key lists" to a foreign power.